

**GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
LOK SABHA**

STARRED QUESTION NO:159
ANSWERED ON:03.08.2005
RELEVANCE OF SAARC
Mollah Shri Hannan

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether SAARC has yet to achieve the purpose for which it was established;
- (b) if so, the reasons for the same;
- (c) the initiatives taken by the Government to make it a real instrument of cooperation in this region;
- (d) whether the Government proposes to strengthen its relations with neighbouring countries, particularly who are members of SAARC;
- (e) if so, the details thereof; and
- (f) the steps taken by the Government in this direction?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (RAO INDERJIT SINGH)

(a),(b),(c),(d),(e)&(f) A statement is laid on the table of the House.

Statement with reference to Parts (a to f) of the Lok Sabha Starred Question no. 159 to be answered on 03-08-2005 regarding 'Relevance of SAARC'

SAARC was established with the objectives of promoting the economic, social and cultural cooperation, as well as to promote mutual understanding and strengthen collective self-reliance among the peoples of South Asia. The activities in SAARC have undoubtedly brought about much greater contact and awareness amongst governments, businesses, cultural and media organizations, scholars, experts, students, and non-governmental organizations dealing with specialized activities. SAARC has also assisted in enabling training and information exchange in a variety of disciplines.

India's efforts, along with those of other member states, are to orient SAARC programmes towards project activities in areas of economic and social development and regional economic integration, which can bring tangible benefits to the people of the region. India has proposed 'SAARC Poverty Alleviation Fund', for financing poverty alleviation projects in SAARC countries outside India. India has also proposed an Infrastructure Fund to finance large projects to improve cross border communications and infrastructure, including ports and energy, and a High Economic Council to deliberate on economic, trade, investment, fiscal and monetary issues associated with regional economic integration,

The Government of India reiterates its continuing and consistent commitment to the SAARC process, and to increasing regional cooperation among Member States towards enhancing prosperity of the SAARC region through economic and social development and regional economic integration. Government is convinced that greater economic integration in South Asia will be beneficial to all countries in the region.

Since its inception in 1985, SAARC has contributed to greater understanding, accommodation and information flow, which has led, first to a preferential trading arrangement, SAPTA, and subsequently to the signing of a framework agreement for free trade, SAFTA, currently under negotiation with a view to bringing it into force from January 1, 2006. The Social Charter and Conventions signed on issues such as trade, food security, terrorism, narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, preventing and combating trafficking in women and children for prostitution, and promotion of child welfare in South Asia offer instruments for Member States to formulate programmes and implement joint strategies in these key areas. People-to-people contacts, one of SAARC's avowed objectives has also increased, as non-State actors - NGOs and civil society- are playing a dynamic and incremental role in nurturing inter-State cooperation and are activating ideas on distributive justice and developmental objectives. The number of diverse associations and professional bodies seeking recognition and apex-body status has registered manifold increase and includes architects, chartered accountants, doctors, engineers, teachers, town planners, women academics, writers and poets, and professional associations dealing with insurance, law and management development. The increasing role played by national Chambers of Commerce as stakeholders in promoting freer trade among South Asian countries is another manifestation of such involvement.